

In 2004, leaders at Baylor University contemplated the construction of Brooks Residential College with a sense of stewardship over the full context of student learning. If students are subject to learning at any time, then why should we not build upon classroom instruction by encouraging and enabling students and their teachers to learn beyond the four walls of a conventional classroom? At this point, key issues emerged. What aims did we hope to accomplish? How should we proceed? Who should join in the collaboration? No simple narrative could do justice to the answers to these questions. The truth is that a series of serendipities and new friendships, combined with a sense of common purpose and a great deal of forbearance and good will, gave rise to a concrete plan for Baylor's first residential college. In 2007, Baylor opened Brooks Residential College – a collective dream of faculty, student affairs educators, and students to enhance the learning environment on campus.

The college expresses a commitment to meeting students' academic needs through its library, faculty offices, seminar and study rooms; social needs through its Great Hall, central Quadrangle, and Junior Common Room; and spiritual needs through its chapel. Instructional and office spaces house ten faculty members in classics, comparative literature, English, French, philosophy, and theology, all of whom teach in an interdisciplinary Great Texts Program.

The residential college's leader, its live-in faculty master, is jointly appointed by the Vice President for Student Life and the Provost and is charged with sustaining a sense of community that fosters academic excellence, intensive faculty-student interaction, and a tradition-rich student experience. Including 10 Senior Fellows appointed from the faculty by the master, the first year of the college witnessed the involvement of ninety-seven members of the university's faculty representing thirty-eight academic departments. The residence hall director, resident chaplain, and undergraduate student leaders are all considered important members of the college leadership team and share in decision making about how best to shape the residential college experience.

Under this model, faculty encounters with students still vary in quality and frequency, and work is left to be done to facilitate more effective formal and informal teaching and learning. Nonetheless, student affairs educators with well-researched and academically ambitious plans have found among the faculty thoughtful champions for this residential community where learning is a priority. As a result, more students of higher ability are living on our campus than ever before. Our faculty members are benefitting from proximity to a thriving community of students whose commitment to learning is strong. Faculty report a deeper understanding of student learning and development, and have gained a new appreciation for student affairs educators. At the same time, this vibrant and aesthetically pleasing residential college is attracting the favorable attention of prospective students and their parents. We are so pleased with this special residential college in which students know and are known by others, develop lifelong friendships, and experience the advantages of a true community.